

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Boxerwood

Other names/site number: Dr. and Mrs. Robert S. Munger House; Munger Lodge;
VDHR File No. 081-7144

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 963 Ross Road

City or town: Lexington State: Virginia County: Rockbridge

Not For Publication: ☐ N/A

Vicinity: ☐ X

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B X C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD; STONE; METAL; GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Boxerwood, located at 963 Ross Road on the outskirts of Lexington, Virginia, is the name given to the 1951-1952 residence of Dr. Robert and Elizabeth Munger and the gardens and arboretum they created beginning in the 1950s, which occupy a nominated area of approximately 7 acres. The Boxerwood house is a one-story frame dwelling of irregular form and Modernist design, the work of Roanoke architects Wells and Meagher (pronounced "Marr"). The exterior walls are clad with a mix of redwood siding and random-coursed limestone facing. The house stands on a poured concrete perimeter foundation. The shallow-pitched shed roof has broad, overhanging eaves. Other features include plate glass windows of various types, a central stone chimney mass, and a semi-detached 1956 addition made to designs by Wells and Meagher. Secondary buildings include a Modernist 1956 one-story guest house with a butterfly shed roof known as Orchard House; a small frame, early twentieth century barn; and a non-historic timber-frame outdoor classroom. The extensively landscaped grounds include mature native trees, the largest antedating 1951, and various specimen trees planted beginning in 1957. Other landscape features include the Old Pond (1952), New Pond (1968), sculptures, and several rare specimens including a mature Sicilian fir (*Abies nebrodensis*). The property's ponds and watercourses drain into Woods Creek, a tributary of the Maury and James rivers. The property's integrity of location,

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setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association are very high, and its combination of Modern architectural design with naturalistic landscapes continues to be character-defining.

Narrative Description

Inventory

The following list is of all the contributing and noncontributing resources located in the nominated area. Noncontributing resources postdate the property's period of significance. A more detailed description of each follows below.

1. Boxerwood (house). 1951-1952. Contributing building.
2. Orchard House. 1956. Contributing building.
3. Barn. Early 20th century. Contributing building.
4. Springhouse. 1956. Contributing building.
5. Gardens and arboretum. 1950s and later. Contributing site.
6. Old Pond. 1952. Contributing site.
7. New Pond. 1968. Noncontributing site.
8. Outdoor classroom. 2013-2014. Noncontributing structure.
9. Solar water heater. Ca. 2010. Noncontributing structure.

House – Exterior

The original section of Boxerwood (the house), which was begun in 1951 and apparently completed in 1952, consists of two rectangular shed-roofed wings joined at an oblique angle. The principal wing is composed of the living room, dining room, kitchen, study, and a carport, the latter partially enclosed as a workshop in 1956. The secondary wing contains four bedrooms and two baths. In 1956 an addition was constructed off the south carport end of the principal wing. The addition consists of a screened multipurpose room (since enclosed) and storage wing.

The lap siding on the original and added sections is almost all redwood, described in the specifications as "resawn California redwood," which was to be stained with Redwood Stain No. 325 made by the Samuel Cabot Company of Boston. The roof is entirely or mostly built-up asphalt with a pebble finish. The stone wall facing runs under a front porch that connects the main entry at the juncture of the two wings to the carport. The facing consists of irregular blocks of blue-gray and buff-colored local limestone with a few horizontal courses near the entry. Windows include a custom floor-to-ceiling wood-framed window wall on the east elevation of the living and dining rooms; casement, fixed, and, awning windows on other elevations; and manufactured metal combination windows (large picture window flanked by operable casements) in each of the house's four bedrooms. The window wall is topped by operable single-pane transoms. Clerestory windows run along the upper walls of the study. A band of over-counter windows (described as Anderson gliding windows in the 1951 drawings) opens to the kitchen.

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The front (driveway-facing) porch is narrow in depth. It is concrete-paved (under or replaced by wood flooring), supported by wood posts, and its sheathed and pitched ceiling is pierced by a series of rectangular skylights. This porch also has flush light fixtures behind shades made from glass ashtrays which are also used in the foyer. The front entry has a wood-framed glass panel door that opens into a small triangular foyer that mediates the joining of the two main wings. Originally the wall section adjacent to the entry had a large single thermopane window that provided a visual connection between a curved exterior planting bed (removed) and a smaller interior planting bed of similar form inside the foyer (extant). The thermopane window was replaced in recent decades by two windows of similar overall size. A curved flagstone terrace (grand piano profile) extends from the living/dining room window wall. The terrace was originally shaded by a trellis and grape arbor supported by wood posts. Presently a more recent aluminum awning structure has replaced the trellis. The limestone chimney has a blocky form and rises to exhaust openings under a concrete cap supported by individual blocks of limestone. The carport, which was reduced in size in 1956, has wood post supports, a concrete floor, exposed roof structure, and a back wall. Storage cabinets also were added in 1956.

The 1956 addition connects to the original house by an open stone-paved passage with square wood posts. The multipurpose room within the addition, referred to by the Mungers as the “breezeway” and so labeled on the 1955 plans, is set at forty-five degrees to the main wing of the original house, although the storage wing beyond makes another forty-five degree turn placing it back in line with the main wing. The multipurpose room originally had banks of large screened openings on both sides; these were replaced with plate glass in the late twentieth century. The openings on the east side are shaded by a cantilevered extension of the roof eaves. As designed, the storage wing contained three store rooms designated as rooms A, B, and C in the plans. However, Rooms A and B were subsequently combined into a single room and attached to the multipurpose room, and windows were added to Room B’s exterior walls. Historically, Room B was used for general storage and Room C for garden storage and potting (Room C is still used for its original function). Room C has double-leaf batten doors on its end. At the same time the addition was made a flagstone-paved covered walkway was added to the south end of the main wing to connect the driveway to the addition.

House – Interior

Boxerwood’s interior has an open plan core consisting of a continuous living and dining space partly divided by an intervening stone chimney mass and continued by the study. The 1951 plans show the study divided from the dining room by French doors and a plate glass panel but these have since been removed and the study is now continuous with the open space. The triangular entrance foyer connects the core to a hallway with access to the bedrooms in the angled wing. Except for the foyer and an adjacent triangular bathroom, rooms are rectangular in plan and some of the bedrooms are nearly square. Finishes are relatively conventional for the period: walls and ceilings are typically plaster finish with oak or redwood wall sheathing in smaller spaces such as the foyer. Floor finishes are varied although all overlay a concrete slab into which is embedded an original radiant heating system. Floor finishes include parquet-like oak block in the main spaces (described as “wood block in mastic” in the plans), polished (“machine finished”)

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concrete floors in the bedrooms, and terra-cotta tile in the kitchen, which replaced the original asphalt tile. The house had extensive built-in bureaus when built, some of which remain in situ.

The chimney is constructed of coursed limestone rubble with a low, off-center, rectangular fireplace and a raised stone hearth. The galley-plan kitchen retains its original base and wall cabinets with enamel-white wood doors, chrome pulls, and simple incised Modernist decorative motifs. The counters are laminate which has replaced the linoleum finish called for in the 1951 specifications. Adjacent to the kitchen is a mechanical room with a boiler and controls for the in-floor radiant heating system, along with several electrical panels designed to meet the building's original service needs. The living room and study retain their original wood bookcases. The living room bookcase is floor-to-ceiling and has batten cabinet doors at its base. The study bookcase runs under the windows.

The multipurpose or "breezeway" room in the 1956 addition has a concrete floor divided by wood strips into rectangles in a pattern modeled on Japanese tatami mats. At the room's north end is a roughly triangular extension with a raised stone platform with a sunken pool of three-lobed amoeboid form. The stonework and pool are floored over by a temporary wood floor. In an early version of the addition's plans, the multipurpose room was labeled as the "play room" and its south elevation contained a glass-roofed hot house and a smaller version of the storage wing. This storage room was used for dining (in warm weather) and also had a cot during the 1950s-1960s.

Grounds

The house stands well back from Ross Road, reached by a gently descending drive that passes a modern parking area near the road entrance, a secondary driveway to the guest house (Orchard House), and a historic barn and non-historic timber-frame outdoor classroom (the various secondary buildings and structures are described after the grounds) before reaching the house. The driveway is gravel and is crossed near the house by a drain covered by a decorative cast iron grating. Near the house stands a large sycamore shown in a 1951 plot plan (five elms, some of which are shown on the plan, died within a few years of the construction of the house). A beech at the south end of the main wing was planted as a relatively large specimen and used by the architects in the 1955 addition design as the focal point of a large circular planting bed with inner and outer stone curbs (the inner curb appears to have been removed or was never built). The 1955 drawings also show the addition of a planting bed against the main wing with a stone curb and flagstone walkway to connect the living/dining room terrace with the added wing. A flagstone walkway connects the front porch to the driveway and another connects the driveway to the end of the 1956 addition. All or most of the property's flagstone walkways, all clustered near the house, therefore appear to date to the 1950s. A vegetable garden was established in 1952 between the main house and the spring in the draw to the west.

The plantings of specimen trees and shrubs, which date principally from 1957 through the 1980s, occur throughout the grounds and are especially prominent on the slope east of the house within view of the living/dining room and terrace. A lawn slopes down from the terrace to dense

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plantings of ornamental conifers and other small trees, a grouping that appears Japanese in character and includes, scattered among the trees, artistically placed stones, although the Mungers wrote in 1978 that the area was not intentionally designed as a Japanese garden. An axial path extends from the yard down through this grouping to an earthen dam constructed in 1968 to create the runoff-fed New Pond. The outflow from the New Pond runs to the Old Pond which was created in 1952 and is also fed by a spring in the draw to the west of the house. Pathways throughout the garden and arboretum are unpaved and unmapped.

A 1978 report by the Mungers lists at least six specimen trees planted in 1957 including China fir (*Cunninghamialanceolata*), Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*), Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*), Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum Monumentale*), Common bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), and Pond (swamp) cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*). A mature Japanese cedar next to the driveway near the house may be the specimen planted in 1957 and a China fir downslope from the bedroom wing may date to the same year. There are a number of mature sugar maples and cypresses on the property, any one of which may include the specimens planted in 1957 (the cypresses grow in the drainage above the New Pond and in the marshy area around the Old Pond). The Mungers also mentioned a California incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) that may have been planted in 1956 or 1957. A plant database, maintained by the current owner, notes additional tree plantings in 1957, such as two Serbian spruces, a Lily magnolia, and a Sweetbay magnolia. In 1958 Robert Munger planted a Japanese holly, a Japanese stewartia, a Bottlebrush buckeye, an Atlas cedar, and an Oriental spruce. More plantings followed on an almost annual basis into the 1980s.

The magnolias and also a crabapple planted in the late 1950s may mark the beginnings of Robert Munger's particular emphasis, more pronounced in the 1960s, on planting magnolias, crabapples, dogwoods, Japanese maples, and rhododendrons and azaleas. These are still prevalent on the grounds. Some trees of particular note include large specimens of Atlantic white cedar and Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*; estimated at 250 years old), a Weeping cherry that is not a graft, and an extremely rare mature Sicilian fir (*Abies nebrodensis*), a double-trunked specimen with rich green foliage and a slender conical form. The Sicilian fir is considered the rarest European fir on account of the virtual eradication of its native stands in Sicily. Oft-cited but unattributed information on the internet states that only between twenty and thirty mature Sicilian firs are known to exist, although many immature specimens are being propagated. Some botanists consider the Sicilian fir to be a variety of the more common Silver fir (*Abies alba*). Boxerwood's Sicilian fir was planted in 1974.

In over thirty years of collecting specimens, Robert Munger estimated that he planted somewhere between 12,000 and 13,000 trees and shrubs on the property, although not all lived. Boxerwood's current woody-plant inventory encompasses over 2,500 specimen trees and shrubs, including especially significant collections of dwarf conifers (167 varieties), magnolias (57 varieties), dogwoods (81 varieties), rhododendrons and azaleas (290 varieties), and Japanese maples (154 varieties). The Mungers also emphasized the ornamental holly (*Ilex*), apple (*Malus*), and cherry (*Prunus*) genera in their plantings.

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Secondary Buildings and Structures

One building predates the Boxerwood house: a small frame barn which stands next to the driveway. The barn, which is associated with a tenant house that once stood on the property, is constructed with wire-nailed circular-sawn framing members and likely dates to the first half of the twentieth century, perhaps the 1920s or early 1930s. The front gabled, one-story building is clad in vertical board siding on one half and vertical slatted siding on the other half, the latter an indication that that part of the building may have once served as a corncrib. Between the two halves is an entry with a z-braced batten door. Shed-roofed extensions are on either side of the building, with the southern one clad in corrugated metal siding while the northern one serves as an open wagon/tractor shelter used by Robert Munger to park his walk-behind Gravelly tractor.

The 1956 guest house, known as Orchard House, is a one-story frame residence which, like the main house, employed a Modernist design by Wells and Meagher. Its character-defining feature is its butterfly roof with two inward-sloping shed roof planes and a center valley. The house has a center brick chimney, weatherboard siding, single-pane casements windows (most or all replacements), and an original set of large, transomed picture windows on the east elevation (similar in character to the living room windows of the main house). Originally, the house had a corner screened porch with an outward-slanted wall; the porch has been enclosed as a room in recent decades. Two small, shed-roofed additions clad in T1-11 siding, have been made to the front south-facing elevation.

In January 2014, a timber-frame outdoor classroom was completed across the driveway from the barn. The structure has a concrete pad foundation, pegged mortise-and-tenon posts, exposed roof trusses, and a metal-sheathed gable roof. Between the outdoor classroom and the main house stands a 2014 solar water heater supported on wood posts. The heater supplements the boiler used to warm the water for the house's under-floor heating. In the draw to the west of the main house is a stuccoed concrete pump house (called the springhouse) with a shed roof. The stucco is inscribed with "1956" and "Sally Turner Munger", the Mungers' daughter. Scattered around the grounds are a number of Modernist sculptures created by both Robert Munger and other artists, including a crescent-shaped aluminum and cor-ten (weathering) steel piece nicknamed "T. Rex" apparently the work of artist Joe Blouin, and a u-shaped form made from a chrome car bumper. Additionally, a whimsical work made from cow bones by Munger entitled "Spare Ribs," hangs on the outside of the barn.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1951-1965

Significant Dates

1951

1957

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wells & Meagher (architect)

W. W. Coffey and Son (builder)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Boxerwood, located in Rockbridge County, Virginia, is the name given to the 1951-1952 Modernist residence of Dr. Robert and Elizabeth Munger and the extensive private garden and arboretum the Mungers developed on the property beginning in the 1950s. Designed by Roanoke architects William Gordon Wells and Richard Leo Meagher in 1951, the house features intersecting shed-roofed wings, redwood and stone cladding, and a window wall with views of the garden and the Blue Ridge Mountains. A stone chimney core, underfloor radiant heating, hearth-centered spatial planning, built-in furnishings, and other features suggest the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian domestic architecture. Wells and Meagher also designed an addition with a Japanese-inspired multipurpose room and a butterfly-roofed guest house built in 1956. Dr. Munger was an avid gardener and specimen collector who in 1957 inaugurated the development of a garden and arboretum that now features over 2,500 specimen trees and shrubs. Today the house and gardens are operated by the Boxerwood Education Association, Inc., as a nature education center for area schools. Boxerwood is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture for the design of its house and guest house, which rank among the earliest known examples of Modernist domestic architecture in the county. Boxerwood is also locally significant under Criterion C in the area of landscape architecture for its garden and arboretum, which are the most extensive and varied known to date to this period in Rockbridge County. The period of significance extends from 1951, the year the Mungers purchased the tract and began planning and construction, to 1965, embracing the early development of the garden and arboretum.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History

The land which Boxerwood now occupies was for many years a part of the Johnston farm, a property associated with the nearby 1797 Zachariah Johnston House (NRHP 1978; DHR No. 081-0168; aka Stone House). In a 1978 report titled "Boxerwood: A Garden of Trees and Shrubs," Robert and Elizabeth Munger described the tract as the Johnston (or Johnstone) farm woodlot, and a 1936 Soil Conservation Service aerial photograph shows it with numerous trees in contrast to cleared hay fields on flanking ridges. Mature trees are also indicated on a partial plot plan made in 1951. The 1936 photo shows at least two buildings, one of which is the small barn that currently stands next to the driveway, while the other is a larger barn (or maybe dwelling) that stood just to the north and faced Ross Road. The north end of Boxerwood's

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driveway connected the two buildings to Ross Road. According to the Mungers, prior to 1951 a tenant house stood in the vicinity of the Old Pond, and some of the trees on the tract were planted by former owner Tom Johnstone, who had planned to build a house there.¹

In March 1951, Dr. Robert Sylvester Munger (1911-1988) and Elizabeth (Betty) Evans Munger (1916-2008) purchased 8.07 acres from the Johnstone family. Robert Munger, originally from Dallas, Texas (his family developed that city's Swiss Avenue and Munger Place neighborhoods in the early decades of the twentieth century), graduated from Washington and Lee College in 1935 and later trained as a physician. He returned to Lexington in 1941, accompanied by his wife, Elizabeth (Betty) Munger, a Massachusetts native and graduate of Bennington College, and in 1942 became Washington and Lee's physician in addition to establishing a private practice serving Rockbridge County. The Munger family expanded to include sons Robert and Christopher and daughter Sally.²

The Mungers lived at various residences in Lexington before purchasing the Boxerwood tract and building their house. The construction drawings for the house, prepared by the Roanoke firm of Wells and Meagher Architects and Engineers, are dated August 30, 1951. In a 1984 interview, Betty Munger recalled that the house was built in 1951, however construction seems likely to have continued into 1952. A 1951-52 period of construction is the understanding of the Mungers' daughter, Sally Munger Mann, who was born in 1951. The name Boxerwood was jokingly given to the property by friends Tom and Jane Riegel "at the very early time when our house and yard were crawling with boxer dogs," as the Mungers later recalled. In 1955 the Mungers again retained Wells and Meagher to design an addition to the house and a guest house known as the Orchard House. The latest drawings are dated early 1956 and construction of the addition and guest house apparently occurred that year. Orchard House initially served as a residence for Betty Munger's mother, and it was named for an apple and pear orchard that stood between it and the main house. The orchard was a vestige from the Johnston period with eight producing trees still standing as late as the 1980s, although only one or two aged pear trees are all that survive today. In 1952 the Mungers dug a pond in a marshy area at the southern tip of their tract (known now as the Old Pond). There is also evidence that in the mid-1950s they prepared for a major planting campaign that commenced in earnest by 1957, what the Mungers later described as the "crucial year" of the work.³

Robert Munger continued to develop and beautify the property until his death in 1988. In his later years Munger was assisted by Karen "KB" Bailey who, along with Hunter Mohring, in 1996 purchased a portion of the property and the following year opened the gardens to the public. Use of the property for educational purposes led to the 2000 creation of the Boxerwood Education Association, whose mission is to "educate and inspire people of all ages to become responsible stewards of the Earth."⁴

Criterion C – Architectural Discussion

The Boxerwood house, its addition, and Orchard House were designed by the Roanoke firm of Wells and Meagher Architects and Engineers. William Gordon Wells first established an

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architectural practice in Roanoke in 1948. He associated with Richard Leo Meagher, a 1932 graduate of Virginia Tech's architecture program who was registered as an architect in Virginia, beginning in 1949. The house was built by local contractor W. W. Coffey and Son, which consisted at the time of W. W. (Walton Wilmouth) Coffey and his son J. F. (James Francis) Coffey. The firm was one of the most prolific in the county in the early/mid-twentieth century, specializing in columned Colonial Revival buildings like the 1927 Lexington High School (later Harrington Waddell Elementary School) and the 1929 Mayflower Hotel. W. W.'s grandson, historian David W. Coffey, recalls his grandfather commenting that the Mungers' house was the "strangest thing he'd ever seen." The same firm also built the Orchard House.⁵

The Mungers supplied certain materials for the house such as the glass ashtrays used as light shades, the oak paneling used in the front entryway, and the stone for the chimney and fireplace. According to supplemental specifications dated September 3, 1951, the latter was "cut fieldstone gathered from old chimneys in the county." The house's "compact, low-impact design reflects a passive solar, organic approach to Modernism, akin to the Usonian House ideal promoted by architect Frank Lloyd Wright," with character-defining features such as a "ground-hugging profile, shed roof, durable natural materials, a concrete slab floor with zoned radiant hydronic heating, a Great Room with a dominant fireplace/hearth and a southeast-facing window wall, a four-bedroom sleeping wing, and built-in furnishings."⁶

Wells and Meagher responded to specifics of the site in the design and placement of the house. They located it at the point where the gently south-sloping site drops away to the draw on the east side of the original tract, high enough that the many large, east-facing windows have views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The bedroom wing was angled so that a preexisting sycamore at the north end of the main wing would not have to be removed (the sycamore still stands). Retention of preexisting trees was important for shade and to provide the house a naturalistic setting which was to be enhanced by Robert Munger's planting campaign beginning a few years later. The south (carport) end of the house stopped short of a preexisting elm tree. According to Sally Munger Mann, the house "was configured around a half dozen huge elm trees which, after the house had been built tortuously around them, immediately died of Dutch elm disease." A photo of the carport end of the house in the mid-1950s shows one of the elms on the east side, along with what may be a hemlock beyond it. The area shown, now densely grown up with specimen conifers, rhododendrons, and other plants, was at the time virtually devoid of plants other than the trees before the Mungers' planting campaign.⁷

The elm at the south end of the house was replaced by a large beech (planted with the aid of machinery) that formed the focal point of a circular planting bed designed in 1955 as part of the addition to the house. The beech's silvery trunk and delicate foliage were visible through the screened openings of the addition's multipurpose room, as was another beech on the opposite side. The house's indoor-outdoor connection was a precept of Modernist domestic design of the era and is most explicitly expressed in the curving plant bed at the front entrance which visually extended from the exterior to the interior through a large plate glass window. The window has since been replaced and the curved concrete curb of the exterior portion of the bed removed but the bed's interior portion remains.⁸

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Wells and Meagher conceived of Boxerwood as a series of elements arranged around and connected by focal or hinge points. This concept is seen in the entry and chimney mass of the 1951 design. The entry occupies the point at which the bedroom wing branches off of the main wing at a forty-five degree angle and is recessed into the pocket formed by the two wings as an architectonic reinforcement of its function as an entry. The adjacent chimney mass stands at the heart of the living space and is the feature around which the space flows. The architects revisited the focal and hinge point concept in their designs for the 1956 addition, juxtaposing the multipurpose room at a forty-five degree angle to the main wing, and in turn juxtaposing the storage room extension at a forty-five degree angle to the multipurpose room. Just as the entry/chimney forms the element around which the original house turns, the beech tree and its architectonic setting of concentric stone curbs serve as a hinge at the connection of the original house and addition.

Boxerwood calls to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian domestic architecture of the 1930s to 1950s. Wright envisioned his Usonian houses as a model of affordable quality design for American homebuilders. Potential Usonian influences on Boxerwood's design are manifested in elements such as the forty-five degree juxtaposition of the wings of the house; the juxtaposition of wood and stone exterior surfaces; the chimney mass as a focal point; integration of the house with the natural setting; the galley kitchen; the serried porch skylights; the built-in furnishings; and the subfloor radiant heating system. The central hearth had long been a feature of Wright's domestic designs whereas features such as angled wings and subfloor heating were not incorporated until the late 1930s.

Other typical treatments found in Wright's work are also found at Boxerwood, such as the banded windows under the skylit front porch, the cantilevered eave extension over the east-side screened openings of the multipurpose room, and the treatment of the addition's elevations, which were originally virtually unrelieved expanses of redwood weatherboard siding that read as secondary to the slightly taller and more articulated multipurpose room. Some of these features may be ascribed to generic Modernist design precepts of the early and mid-1950s, which were partly shaped by Wright's promotion of his architecture in such publications as *Architectural Forum*, *House Beautiful*, and *House and Home* from the late 1930s through the 1950s. The tatami mat pattern in the multipurpose room and its reference to traditional Japanese spatial planning, appreciated by Modernist architects of the era, suggests non-Wrightian influence (although Wright was an admirer of Japanese architecture and knew about tatami mat planning).⁹

Apart from the extent of Wrightian influence in Wells and Meagher's design for Boxerwood, the house marked a dramatic departure from the historicist architecture that prevailed in Rockbridge County and Lexington during the first half of the twentieth century. *The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge* (forthcoming) suggests Boxerwood ranks among the county's earliest Modernist dwellings. The Rockbridge/Lexington community was deeply conservative in its domestic architectural taste and was dominated by the Colonial Revival style in the years preceding Boxerwood's construction. Not many years earlier, in 1937, Lexington citizens launched a successful campaign to prevent the construction of a non-conforming movie theater in the town

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(the theater, the State, was instead built in the Colonial Revival style). Although an Art Deco water tower was built outside Lexington in the late 1930s as well as a few vaguely Modernist public schools in the late 1930s, modernism did not arrive fully in the community until after World War II. The most prominent Modernist work during the period of Boxerwood's conception and construction was Lexington's International-Style Stonewall Jackson Memorial Hospital built from 1952 to 1954. Designed by the New York firm of York and Sawyer and presented to the community in draft design form in 1950, the hospital would have been well known to a leading physician like Robert Munger. In fact, this hospital and Boxerwood shared a design feature: porch roof lightwells. At the hospital these cast light into the waiting area (the 1952-1954 wing of the hospital with this feature has since been demolished). Longtime Munger family friend Karen Bailey recalls that the Mungers' house "sure caused a lot of ruckus" in Lexington, although apparently local criticism focused most on the house's perceived remoteness from town (an insurmountable half mile from what was then the westernmost suburb) rather than its modernist style.¹⁰

Criterion C – Landscape Architecture Discussion

In their 1978 account of their landscaping enterprise, "Boxerwood: A Garden of Trees and Shrubs," Robert and Elizabeth Munger stated that at first "beds and lawn were never related to a pre-ordained design, and, in looking back, our program now appears to us as innocent and artless as the pup that followed the mower." However, their piecemeal approach changed with time. "Whereas initially considerable thought had been given to the choice of individual plants, now we began to grasp the significance of thinking of the garden fundamentally as the space between our plants as well as the plants themselves. Perhaps this is just another way of saying that we had begun consciously and deliberately to *design* a garden."¹¹

Though the garden initially developed in the spontaneous organic fashion described by the Mungers, the overall design was more methodical. The Mungers' original focus was the construction of a house, but already in 1952 they were adding a feature—the Old Pond—intended to augment the landscape. "Our early efforts were aimed at clearing and developing the immediate surround of the house," the Mungers wrote. "At first just rough paths were cut through the brush to the planting sites with a sickle-bar on the Gravelly, trying to preserve indigenous beauty wherever encountered. Then certain shapes began to assert themselves which gradually congealed into rudimentary plant beds connected by a network of crude paths." The process was both additive and subtractive, carving away unwanted plant materials and adding new ones. The Mungers identified 1957 as the "crucial" first year of their tree planting campaign, but as the addition design indicates, they were in 1955 already planning ahead by including storage rooms for the supplies needed for the campaign.¹²

Robert Munger was inspired to create the garden at Boxerwood by a catalogue of rare and unusual plants published by the Kingsville Nurseries in Maryland, which was given to him by local garden enthusiast Frank (Jay) Gilliam, credited as one of Munger's "mentors" in the 1978 account. The Mungers traveled to Japan and China on garden tours organized by noted horticulturalist Dr. H. Marc Cathey, a former director of the U.S. National Arboretum. The

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Mungers apparently did not make purchases on these Asian trips but it is possible they did so during subsequent trips to Europe. Most of their plants, however, were obtained from nurseryman Henry Hohman at the now-defunct Kingsville Nurseries, the “last of the marvelous, general and rare-plant nurseries on this continent” as they described the nursery in 1978. Other plants they obtained from other American nurseries and from Hillier and Company in Winchester, England. The Mungers were not always successful in growing exotic plants under conditions at Boxerwood, though it is clear they never shrank from the challenge. “We asked of no one,” they wrote, “whether purposefully or not, any actual landscaping advice, but decided instead to make our own mistakes,” which seemed to them “as myriad as Japanese beetles on a raspberry bush.” In over thirty years of collecting, Robert Munger estimated that he had planted somewhere between twelve and thirteen thousand trees and shrubs. He suggested that he had probably lost about half of these plantings to “wrong tree-wrong place,” disease, infestation, or short life expectancy.¹³

As a designed landscape, Boxerwood is without precedent in Rockbridge County. The county has a long tradition of notable gardens and landscapes with such highlights as Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s Civil War-era kitchen garden in Lexington (no longer extant but referenced by the garden at the Jackson House historic site); the plantings at Lexington’s Col Alto (NRHP 1990; DHR #117-0003) designed by Harvard-trained landscape architect Rose Greely in the 1930s; as well as numerous garden designs by Charles Gillette, who was perhaps Virginia’s foremost landscape architect of the early to mid-twentieth century. However, these other gardens and landscapes differ greatly from Boxerwood in both character and scope. The sheer volume and diversity of specimen plantings at Boxerwood rival the programs more typically associated with institutional arboretums such as Richmond’s Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Just two other recently documented residential properties elsewhere in Virginia are known to feature a comparable extent and diversity of plant material. In far southern Virginia, MacCallum More (NRHP 2010; DHR #186-5020) in Mecklenburg County developed beginning in the 1920s, although that garden, designed by Charles Gillette, is more formal in character than Boxerwood and relies more on architectural artifacts and follies for its aesthetic effect. In eastern Virginia, the Gillette-designed garden at Woods Hill (NRHP 2014; DHR #145-5032) in Franklin is also somewhat comparable in scope, but features far fewer exotic specimens. In western Virginia, therefore, Boxerwood ranks among the best-known and -documented landscape designs associated with a residential property.¹⁴

Endnotes

1. Cote and Scarlett, “Zachariah Johnston House;” Soil Conservation Service; Munger and Munger, “Boxerwood,” 1-2; Wells and Meagher, Architectural Drawings. A number of individuals contributed to the preparation and review of the nomination. The Boxerwood Education Association sponsored the nomination and staff and board members, including Managing Director Bruce Bytnar, horticulturalist Faith Vosburgh, and board members Joe Dinardo and Peter Gruner, assisted the research and mapping. Sally Munger Mann, the daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Munger, shared recollections and photographs of the house during its early years. Karen “KB” Bailey shared historical documents and her recollections of gardening

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with Robert Munger in the 1980s. Others who provided assistance included historian David W. Coffey; the staff of the Virginia Room of the Roanoke Public Library; and Lisa McCown and Seth McCormick-Goodhart at Leyburn Library Special Collections at Washington and Lee University. The nomination was reviewed by Virginia Department of Historic Resources staff members Lena McDonald and Michael Pulice.

2. Rockbridge County Deed Book 210, p. 421; Elizabeth Munger interview; Giles, "Boxerwood."

3. Sally Munger Mann email; Karen Bailey personal communication with the author, December 2014; Wells and Meagher, Architectural Drawings; Elizabeth Munger interview, 1984; Soil Conservation Service; Munger and Munger, "Boxerwood," 1, 17.

4. Boxerwood website.

5. Sally Munger Mann email; David Coffey personal communication with the author, December 2014; Wells and Dalton, *Virginia Architects*, 291, 467; *Virginia Tech Magazine* (Spring 2002); Wells and Meagher architectural drawings.

6. Wells and Meagher, "Specifications;" Giles, "Boxerwood."

7. Sally Munger Mann email; Wells and Meagher, Architectural Drawings.

8. Karen Bailey personal communication with the author, December 2014; Wells and Meagher architectural drawings.

9. Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses*, 16, 21, 51, 148-158.

10. Karen Bailey personal communication with the author, December 2014; Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*.

11. Munger and Munger, "Boxerwood," 9.

12. Munger and Munger, "Boxerwood," 9.

13. Karen Bailey personal communication with the author, December 2014; Munger and Munger, "Boxerwood," 8, 13, 18.

14. Pezzoni, *Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*; Chen and Moran, "MacCallum More and Hudgins House Historic District," 9-11; Agelasto, "Woods Hill," 6-9.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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_____. "Specifications for the Residence of Dr. and Mrs. Robert S. Munger, Lexington, Virginia." 1951. Private collection, Lexington, Va.

Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton. *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1997.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____ previously determined eligible by the National Register
____ designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR ID# 081-7144

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 7 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☒ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17 | Easting: 335200 | Northing: 4181900 |
| 2. Zone: 17 | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: 17 | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: 17 | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated area is shown on the attached 1:200-scale Sketch Map that accompanies the nomination. The boundary encompasses the core historic portion of the Boxerwood property including the main house (1951-1952 and 1956), the guest house and springhouse (1956), the early 20th century barn, and garden and landscape features such as

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early plantings and the Old Pond (1952), and excludes peripheral non-historic secondary structures and a parking lot.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the property's historic setting as well as all contributing buildings and sites associated with the property, including the significant landscape features and plantings developed during the period of significance. Non-historic features associated with the property's current use as an educational facility are excluded from the historic boundary as they do not contribute to the property's historic setting, feeling, and association.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni and Leslie A. Giles
organization: Landmark Preservation Associates
street & number: 6 Houston St.
city or town: Lexington state: VA zip code: 24450
e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net
telephone: (540) 464-5315
date: December 12, 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo

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date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

All photos common to:

Name of Property: Boxerwood

City or Vicinity: Lexington

County: Rockbridge

State: Virginia

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni or Leslie A. Giles

Date Photographed: May or December 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

Photo 1 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0001.

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Date: December 2014

View: Boxerwood front (west) elevation, view looking east.

Photo 2 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0002.

Photographer: Leslie A. Giles

Date: May 2014

View: Boxerwood house garden (east) elevation, view looking south.

Photo 3 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0003.

Photographer: Leslie A. Giles

Date: May 2014

View: Boxerwood addition east elevation, view looking south.

Photo 4 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0004.

Photographer: Leslie A. Giles

Date: May 2014

View: Boxerwood house living room.

Photo 5 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0005.

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Date: December 2014

View: Boxerwood addition floor with tatami mat pattern.

Photo 6 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0006.

Photographer: Leslie A. Giles

Date: May 2014

View: Garden to east of house, view looking east.

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Photo 7 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0007.

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Date: December 2014

View: Garden with "Great Oak" (Shumard oak) in foreground and Old Pond at bottom of hill, view looking south.

Photo 8 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0008.

Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Date: December 2014

View: Orchard House, view looking northeast.

Photo 9 of 9: VA_RockbridgeCounty_Boxerwood_0009.

Photographer: Leslie A. Giles

Date: May 2014

View: Outdoor classroom, view looking north.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.